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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: HEAD OF PUBLIC BROADCASTING RESIGNS

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Levan Kubaneishvili's July 20 resignation

from his position as Georgia's public broadcasting (GPB) general director appears to be a tacit recognition of the continuing political battles that have swirled around the station for months. He has not publicly explained his resignation, but the move has sparked speculation by many that Kubaneishvili's departure was as an attempt by the GOG to appease the opposition who have been very critical of him and have demanded his replacement. An application period is now open to all candidates to fill the vacancy. The public broadcasting board will make the final decision on the new director general on August 10. The board of trustees itself has been hampered by the resignations of four of its nine members in response to what they described as GPB's biased coverage of the non-parliamentary opposition-led protests this past spring. As part of his proposal for further democratic reforms, President Saakashvili suggested that the makeup of the board of trustees be equal parts opposition candidates and GoG candidates, with the last seat being a member of civil society. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: Kubaneishvili, who expressed his frustration at being a political target in a previous meeting with the Ambassador a few months ago, may have simply grown tired of dealing with the politics surrounding the position. The position has become a lightning rod for opposition criticism making it likely the next general director will also face tremendous political pressure from all sides. Saakashvili's proposal appears to recognize the need to de-politicize the GPB which may be a tall order in the current political environment. End Comment.

WHY QUIT NOW?

¶3. (C) Levan Kubaneishvili resigned after only serving 15 months of his six-year term. This resignation comes on the heels of previous resignations by four members of the public broadcasting board of trustees, who resigned because of what they said was insufficient quality coverage of opposition protests by GPB. Deputy General Director Gia Chanturia will be the new acting Director General until a replacement is appointed. Kubaneishvili has remained silent on his reasons for resigning, leading to speculation that his resignation was at least in part GOG influenced. Kubaneishvili is reputed to be very close to the Saakashvili administration and is highly unpopular with the non-parliamentary opposition leaders who have consistently demanded his removal. The move to replace him could be perceived as a goodwill gesture by GOG to placate their concerns about GPB's coverage, although critics seem to be reserving judgment about whether this was a significant move until a replacement is named.

WHO WANTS THIS JOB?

¶4. (C) Public Broadcasting's board of trustees initiated an open application period to fill the vacancy. Anyone may submit an application for the position until August 3 and the

current board members will elect the new director on August 10. Despite the fact there are only five members currently on the board, the members represent a quorum able to make a final determination on appointing a new general director. The composition of the original nine-member board was the result of an informal understanding between the GOG and the opposition reached in February 2008. The current makeup of the board may cause independent journalists to pass up the opportunity to apply for the position since the remaining members are viewed as openly pro-government. Never one to shy away from political confrontation, Erosi Kitsmarishvili - former Georgian Ambassador to Moscow - announced his intention to run for the position. Kitsmarishvili, a former Saakashvili ally and former owner of Rustavi 2 television channel is the only announced candidate at this time.

15. (C) In his July 20 speech to Parliament, Saakashvili offered a proposal to grant four seats on the board to the opposition keeping four seats for GOG nominees. Saakashvili proposed that the last seat be reserved for a member of civil society with the goal of de-politicizing public broadcasting. Parliament tabled a pending draft amendment to increase the number of trustees from nine to fifteen which was aimed at proving a more "inclusive" board, and the expanded board idea could be acted upon at any time.
TEFFT